

## **Romano Prodi**

President of the European Commission

Monsieur le Président de la République,  
Presidents,  
Ministers,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

First let me extend my greetings and appreciation to those who have been instrumental in bringing together here in Paris this great gathering of researchers, of eminent personalities from the world of medicine, academia and politics, of company managers and activists, in support of the fight against AIDS. You have done great work and I am sure it will help strengthen the hand of life in the fight against disease and death.

Today I wanted to bring you a message of confidence too. But I have just returned from Africa, where I attended the African Union Summit in Maputo, Mozambique, as I attended the Conference on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg last year. I have come back overwhelmed by the magnitude and scale of the catastrophe afflicting that continent, devastated by AIDS and other infectious diseases.

The health crisis besetting Africa -- and the whole developing world too -- is not just a personal tragedy for the men, women and children suffering from the disease. It is also an economic catastrophe, because it attacks the active members of the population: young working adults, those who run businesses, have children and bring them up. AIDS is the gravest threat to Africa's survival and a challenge to all mankind.

So despite what the European Union has already done and the pledges it has made for the future, I am not here to bring you a self-congratulatory message. Instead I am here to tell you that we must continue to rally everyone -- researchers, the medical profession, businesses, associations and politicians -- without let-up.

Equal opportunity for a healthy life is a cornerstone of all human societies. With the threat of AIDS hanging over us, it is a precondition for economic and social development. It is a test of our will to build a world that is more in harmony with our fundamental values.

History will judge us harshly if we do not use our power to reduce poverty, as we vowed at the Millennium Summit, and avert the threat of death hanging over mankind.

The three great contagious diseases HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis need to be tackled on many fronts at once: peace and security, for without them nothing is possible; economic development and the struggle against poverty; trade, which means making drugs available at reasonable prices; research and financing of projects.

Those were the aims of the Action Programme that the European Union launched over two years ago to combat the three main contagious diseases.

In total the European Commission has allocated more than a billion additional euro to the Action Programme to date.

With the full support of the Member States and the European Parliament, the European Commission has worked to adopt a regulation to allocate an extra 351 million euro to the Action Programme for four years.

We have also stepped up support for the fight against HIV/AIDS through a special budget heading that focuses on reproductive and sexual health and rights, worth a total of 74 million euro for the next four years.

We have also decided to allocate more than 450 million euro over the next four years to research and development covering new drugs and vaccines for poverty-related diseases.

We have tripled our support for the fight against the three diseases in our regular assistance programmes for countries of the South.

We want to make more progress in tiered pricing of medicines, an idea we introduced a few years ago and which has just received a boost through the adoption of unprecedented EU legislation. This legislation seeks to prevent the reimporting of reduced-price drugs into Europe and therefore to encourage the pharmaceutical industry to get involved. Some laboratories have already done so. I call on the others to show willing.

I expect the ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Cancún next September to lift the barriers that currently stop generic medicines being distributed in countries of the South that cannot produce them on their own.

The European Union believes it is possible to protect scientific innovations while preserving the unalienable right of all to treatment. I expect other world decision-makers to agree with this principle.

I now come to the Global Health Fund.

When we worked out our Action Programme, the European Commission strongly supported the idea of setting up a Global Fund to finance specific projects. We were convinced that a mechanism was needed to provide additional resources, quickly step up efforts already undertaken, help us to do things better than before and achieve results fast.

The Commission is a member of the Board of the Global Fund and it chairs -- or is actively represented on -- several of its committees.

We pay special attention to the interests of the developing countries and participation by civil society and people living with the disease.

We encourage the supply of tiered-price, high-quality products to countries of the South, and the distribution of generic products in those countries.

We want to introduce openness, transparency and innovation in administration -- in cooperation with all the main players.

Above all, we want to make it a viable, long-term financial instrument that can finance all quality projects proposed by the partners of the South. The European Commission has paid 120 million euro into the Global Fund and allocated an additional 340 million for the coming years: 170 million euro from the European Development Fund and 170 million from the budget. This brings our total contribution to the Fund to 460 million euro. I will personally work to ensure these figures represent a minimum contribution and that we do our utmost to increase them.

The EU Member States have collectively increased funding to fight against the three diseases through additional aid to national and regional programmes, UN agencies, funds and programmes and other multilateral channels. For the Global Fund alone, the European Union has pledged 2.56 billion dollars in additional resources. The EU contribution therefore now accounts for 55% of all resources pledged to the Fund.

The G8 meeting at Evian and the Thessaloniki European Council provided an opportunity for Jacques Chirac, to whom I express my special thanks, Tony Blair and other European leaders, including myself if I may say so, to draw attention once more to the need for financing for the Global Fund.

With a view to this Conference, the EU Council of Ministers has just adopted a declaration calling on Member State Governments to continue their support for the Global Fund, and if possible to increase it.

I know that some participants wanted an even clearer and firmer commitment. I did too, and I personally continue to be very keen on the rallying target of a total EU contribution of one billion per year. And I am heartened by the statements coming from all EU capitals. If the European Commission's offer of 340 million euro is included, Europe has pledged over 1.2 billion euro since Evian.

Like you, I heard Nelson Mandela's appeal from this podium. But I say to him, as I say to you here: Why have doubts about the European Union? Has the EU ever shirked its responsibilities? Is it not by far the largest donor of development aid and the foremost contributor to the Global Fund?

The EU's decision-making processes are complex because they involve 15 democracies, whose procedures and constraints need to be respected. Sometimes we are like the tortoise in the fable, advancing one step at a time. But like the tortoise we get there in the end.

The aim is to develop the Global Fund.

I give you my word and my formal undertaking on that.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am impressed by the determination of the NGOs and activists present here today. Their protests have often been very valuable in cutting through red tape and countering the shortcomings of institutions and governments.

I call on you all to continue to work together to develop effective and sustainable ways of cooperating, so we can save our fellow human beings who are struggling against disease and to restore hope.

Thank you.